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NATIONAL OCEANIC & ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION • US DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

White House, Commerce Officials, Seafood Industry Leaders Ask Congress to Endorse Aquaculture Legislation

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This week, Commerce Secretary Carlos M. Gutierrez convened seafood industry leaders in Washington, D.C., to heighten awareness of offshore aquaculture legislation. The bill, HR2010 in the House and S1609 in the Senate, will give the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration authority to regulate and monitor aquaculture growth into federal waters off U.S. coasts.

On balance, summit panelists overwhelmingly sent a message to Congress that industry is poised and ready to develop a new, ecologically responsible offshore aquaculture industry. The new industry would create jobs and revenue for coastal communities and provide American consumers with more homegrown seafood choices.

"Aquaculture can be a great, new source of innovation, but we need a framework that fosters innovation, investment and prosperity," Gutierrez said. "As a major growth engine, aquaculture can help preserve the historic ties that fishing communities have to the oceans and create a new and vibrant means for job creation."

Gutierrez said that while demand for seafood is growing, the United States is working to ensure its wild fisheries remain among the most productive and best managed in the world. But he cautioned that the domestic wild harvest is insufficient to meet new demands, and global competitors have seized the market opportunity of aquaculture while the United States has fallen behind.

A number of economic drivers prompted the Administration to develop and propose the legislation, including a desire to increase domestic production to close the \$8 billion seafood trade deficit and to give American seafood farmers and investors greater opportunity to participate in the \$70 billion global industry. U.S. aquaculture accounts for only about 1.5 percent of global aquaculture production. Fish and shellfish consumption continues to rise in the United States, causing government officials to raise a warning flag that without this legislation there will be a major shortfall in supply in the next 25 years. New government figures show that seafood consumption in the United States rose in 2006 from 16.2 pounds per person to 16.5 pounds per person.

James L. Connaughton, chairman of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, yesterday reiterated President Bush's commitment to passage of the legislation.

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“There is absolutely no reason why this Congress cannot adopt this bipartisan aquaculture legislation,” Connaughton said. “We have engaged the public, held a national dialogue, and now it is time to act to develop regulatory certainty for industry, ensure ecological integrity, and allow the United States to become a beacon for the world in responsible aquaculture development. The stage is set and pre-wired for action.”

Citing statistics from government health experts advising more seafood consumption for health benefits, Connaughton noted that aquaculture ranks on the list of the Administration’s highest legislative priorities because seafood safety and availability is a food security and human welfare issue.

During the summit, seafood industry leaders provided a wealth of information that will help guide Congressional discussion about the legislation. Summit participants agreed that the legislation should provide for the development of an environmentally responsible and sustainable aquaculture industry, while also providing the framework for regulatory certainty that will aid development and growth of new business.

Panelist’s recommendations, speeches, and transcripts from the summit will soon be available on the summit Web site: <http://aquaculture2007.noaa.gov>.

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The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department, is celebrating 200 years of science and service to the nation. From the establishment of the Survey of the Coast in 1807 by Thomas Jefferson to the formation of the Weather Bureau and the Commission of Fish and Fisheries in the 1870s, much of America's scientific heritage is rooted in NOAA.

NOAA is dedicated to enhancing economic security and national safety through the prediction and research of weather and climate-related events and information service delivery for transportation, and by providing environmental stewardship of our nation's coastal and marine resources. Through the emerging Global Earth Observation System of Systems (GEOSS), NOAA is working with its federal partners, more than 60 countries and the European Commission to develop a global monitoring network that is as integrated as the planet it observes, predicts and protects.

On the Web:

Aquaculture Economic Summit: <http://aquaculture2007.noaa.gov>
NOAA Aquaculture Program: www.aquaculture.noaa.gov
NOAA Fisheries Service: www.nmfs.noaa.gov
NOAA: www.noaa.gov

Global Aquaculture Economic Facts

- The U.S. is the third largest consumer of seafood in the world, but only 11th in volume of aquaculture producers.
- During the past three decades, the number of fishers and aquaculturists has grown faster than the world's population, and employment in the fisheries sector has grown faster than employment in traditional agriculture.
- In 2004, an estimated 41 million people worked as fishers and fish farmers, accounting for 3.1 percent of the 1.36 billion people economically active in agriculture worldwide and representing a growth rate of 35 percent since 1990.
- The great majority of fishers and fish farmers are in developing countries, principally in Asia. Significant increases over recent decades, in particular in Asia, reflect the strong expansion of aquaculture activities.
- In 2004, the number of fish farmers accounted for one-quarter of the total number of fish workers.
- The contribution of aquaculture to global supplies of fish, crustaceans, mollusks and other aquatic animals continues to grow, increasing from 3.9 percent of total production by weight in 1970 to 27.1 percent in 2000 and 32.4 percent in 2004.
- Aquaculture continues to grow more rapidly than all other animal food-producing sectors. Worldwide, the sector has grown at an average rate of 8.8 percent per year since 1970, compared with only 1.2 percent for capture fisheries and 2.8 percent for terrestrial farmed meat production systems over the same period.
- Production from aquaculture has greatly outpaced population growth, with per capita supply from aquaculture increasing from 0.7 kg in 1970 to 7.1 kg in 2004, representing an average annual growth rate of 7.1 percent.
- World aquaculture (food fish and aquatic plants) has grown significantly during the past half-century. From a production of below 1 million tons in the early 1950s, production in 2004 was reported to have risen to 59.4 million tons, with a value of US\$70.3 billion.
- This represents an average annual increase of 6.9 percent in quantity and 7.7 percent in value over reported figures for 2002.
- In 2004, countries in the Asia and the Pacific region accounted for 91.5 percent of the production quantity and 80.5 percent of the value.
- Of the world total, China is reported to account for 69.6 percent of the total quantity and 51.2 percent of the total value of aquaculture production.

*Source: United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization
World Review of Fisheries and Aquaculture, 2006 Report*

<ftp://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/009/a0699e/a0699e01.pdf>